

# FREEDOM WRITING

Showing posts with label Gulf of Tonkin. [Show all posts](#)

Saturday, August 2, 2014

## Half a Century Since an 'Historic Mistake'

Lyndon Johnson - Report on the Gulf o...

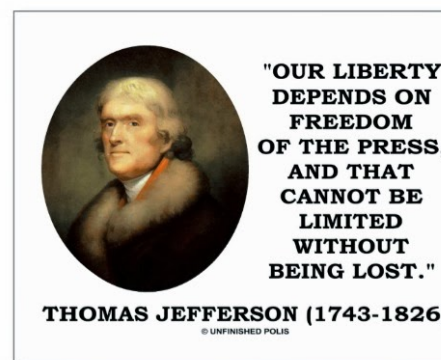


Fifty years ago, in August 1964, North Vietnamese torpedo boats reportedly attacked the American destroyer *Maddox* and, possibly, the *Turner Joy* in the Gulf of Tonkin.

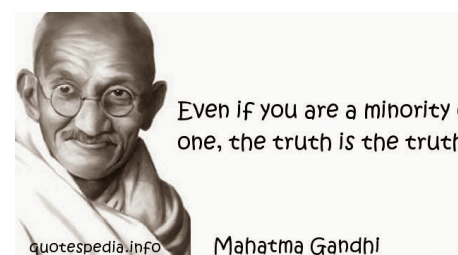
See, there were (reportedly) two separate incidents. The first occurred on Aug. 2, 1964, and it seems pretty certain that one *did* happen. The *Maddox* was attacked, and a sea battle followed in which the *Maddox* fired nearly 300 rounds at the torpedo boats.

Two days later, the *Turner Joy* was reportedly fired on after it had moved into position to provide support for the *Maddox*. The evidence of

## Freedom of the Press



## Truth

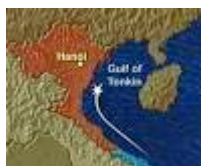


## History

that incident was shakier. It was initially reported as a sea battle, implying that *both* sides had been firing weapons, but it later emerged that the firing of *Turner Joy's* weapons may have been triggered (so to speak) by "*Tonkin ghosts*" — false radar images.

(An internal **National Security Agency** report, which was declassified in 2005, found that "[i]t is not simply that there is a different story as to what happened; it is that no attack happened that night.")

Real or false, President Lyndon Johnson used the attacks as justification for escalating American involvement in Vietnam — and winning political support from some conservatives.



What most Americans did not know was that the *Maddox* had been sent to the Gulf of Tonkin on a special mission — to provoke the North Vietnamese into using their radar. The Americans would then track the radar — "*the naval equivalent of spotting enemy artillery positions so that they can be destroyed by counterbattery fire,*" historian William Manchester wrote.

But the Americans apparently hadn't expected their presence to draw enemy fire.

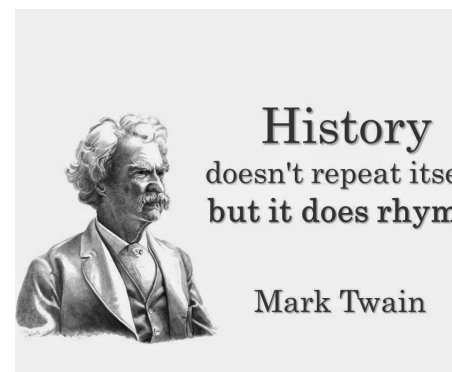
The outcome was the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, a joint resolution approved by both chambers of Congress a week later. It gave Johnson the authority — without Congress' formal declaration of war — to use "*conventional*" military force.

The House approved the resolution 416-0. In the Senate, only two senators — Wayne Morse of Oregon and Ernest Gruening of Alaska — voted against it.

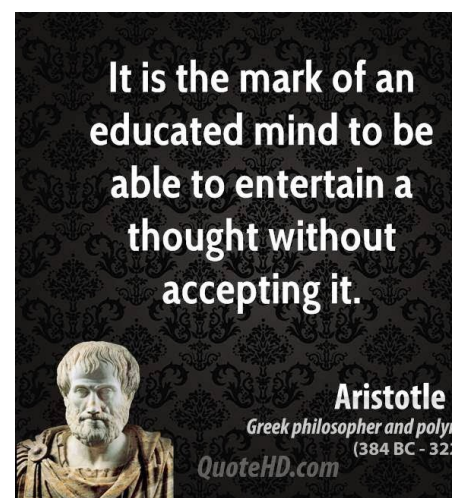
"*I believe this resolution to be a historic mistake,*" **Morse told his colleagues.** "*I believe that, within the next century, future generations will look with dismay and great disappointment upon a Congress which is now about to make such a historic mistake.*"

It didn't even take that long.

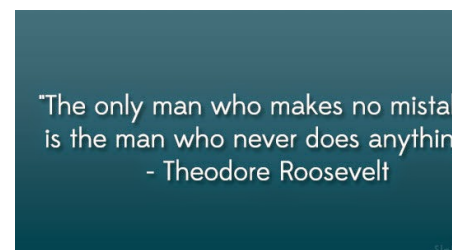
By 1967, opposition to the war was growing and the rationale for American involvement was under close scrutiny by the public. A movement to repeal the resolution began to gather steam. The repeal was achieved as an attachment to the Foreign Military Sales Act of 1971,



## The Marketplace of Ideas



## Making Mistakes



## Lessons Learned



which was signed into law by Richard Nixon.

To further limit a president's war powers, Congress passed the War Powers Resolution of 1973 over Nixon's veto.

But **there weren't many critical comments** in August 1964.

It was perceived as the logical progression of the anti-appeasement policy that had been in style since World War II.

*"President Johnson has earned the gratitude of the free world,"* wrote the **Washington Post**.

Fifty years later, **The Hill** calls it a *"tragedy."* To me, that seems more accurate than *"historic mistake,"* although I guess both are correct.

And Johnson's response to the perceived aggression of the North Vietnamese apparently shored up his support on the right. In July, **Gallup** reported that 58% of respondents had been critical of his handling of the military effort in Vietnam, but in August, nearly three-fourths of respondents *approved*. That was an impressive shift. And, in November, Johnson won a full four-year term as president by the widest margin in history.

Whether legitimately or not, it is clear that Johnson reaped considerable *immediate* political benefits from what historian Theodore White called a *"deft response"* to a threat.

*"For all I know,"* Johnson told a group of visitors in 1965, *"our Navy was shooting at whales out there."*

Posted by **David Goodloe** at **Saturday, August 02, 2014** No comments:

Labels: **1964**, **Ernest Gruening**, **Foreign Military Sales Act of 1971**, **Gallup**, **Gulf of Tonkin**, **history**, **LBJ**, **presidency**, **Turner Joy**, **USS Maddox**, **Vietnam**, **war**, **war powers**, **War Powers Resolution of 1973**, **Wayne Morse**

[Home](#)

[Older Posts](#)

Subscribe to: **Posts (Atom)**

## Aristotle (384-322 B.C.)

*"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence is not an act but a habit."*

## Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790)

*"Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn."*

## Unknown

*"Everything in life can teach you a lesson. You just have to be willing to observe and learn."*

## Howard Arnold Walter (1883-1918)

*"I would be true, for there are those who trust me;  
I would be pure, for there are those who care;  
I would be strong, for there is much to suffer;  
I would be brave, for there is much to dare."*

## Attention, Spammers

Spam is not tolerated in comments here.

I write like  
**H. P. Lovecraft**

*I Write Like* by Mémoires, Mac journal sc